

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
January 13, 2004

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HHS ALTERED SCIENTISTS' CONCLUSIONS IN REPORT ON HEALTHCARE DISPARITIES

WASHINGTON, DC — Today Rep. Henry A. Waxman, Rep. Elijah E. Cummings, Rep. Ciro D. Rodriguez, Rep. Michael M. Honda, Del. Donna M. Christensen, Rep. Hilda L. Solis, Rep. Danny K. Davis, and Rep. Dale E. Kildee released a report documenting substantial alterations to the *National Healthcare Disparities Report* made by officials at the Department of Health and Human Services. While the draft executive summary of the report prepared by HHS scientists called healthcare disparities “national problems” that are “pervasive in our health care system” and carry a significant “personal and societal price,” the final report, which was released on December 23, contained none of these conclusions.

“This is yet another example of the Administration’s manipulation of science to fit its political goals,” said Rep. Waxman, Ranking Minority Member, Committee on Government Reform. “Rather than dedicate the resources necessary to eliminate the serious healthcare disparities in this country, HHS is pretending they don’t exist.”

“Just like a tumor cannot be healed by covering it with a bandage, healthcare disparities cannot be eliminated with misrepresented facts,” said Rep. Elijah E. Cummings, Chair of the Congressional Black Caucus. “I urge the Bush Administration to stand by its commitment to eliminating racially-defined healthcare disparities by 2010. As recommended by the National Institute of Medicine in its 562-page report entitled *Unequal Treatment: Confronting Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Health Care*, healthcare disparities can only be addressed by increasing access to healthcare, training healthcare workers to deal with a diverse group of patients, recruiting more minorities to work in healthcare, and other action-oriented initiatives. Disparities do not disappear by concealing information.”

“It’s inconceivable that HHS could, in good conscience, remove the word that describes not only the shortcomings, but the pain caused by the holes in our current healthcare system,” said Rep. Ciro D. Rodriguez, Chair of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus. “It’s vital to receive accurate information in order to correct our current system and to guarantee a better one for our children. Removing the word does not remove the issue.”

“Instead of leading the fight against healthcare disparities, HHS is downplaying the serious inequities faced by racial and ethnic minorities,” said Rep. Michael M.

Honda, Chair of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus. “By tampering with the conclusions of its own scientists, HHS is placing politics before social justice.”

“I am angry beyond words,” said Del. Donna M. Christensen, Chair of the Congressional Black Caucus Health Braintrust. “This is the same refusal to acknowledge or address the healthcare of minorities that we have been dealing with since the Bush administration took office. The original report validates all we have been saying for years. We want the original report released.”

“As a Latina, I know that health disparities in minority communities are abundant, yet this report minimizes the urgent need to address this national crisis. If this is the way that this Administration intends to address health disparities in minority communities, then we have a long way to reach the goals of quality American health care for all,” said Rep. Hilda L. Solis, Chair of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Health Task Force.

“Disparities are part of the reality of the American healthcare system,” said Rep. Danny K. Davis, Secretary of the Congressional Black Caucus. “The costs of covering up, hiding, or ignoring those very real disparities are measured in increased pain, decreased quality of life, and lives lost for African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans and women. Mere words are inadequate to describe the inhumanity of such actions.”

“The Bush Administration would rather ignore and conceal the disparities that exist within our healthcare system, instead of confronting the problem and providing real solutions,” said Rep. Dale E. Kildee, Democratic Co-Chair of the Congressional Native American Caucus. “Manipulating the report will only exacerbate the problem for millions of minorities by prolonging and perpetuating the inequalities that already exist under our current health care system.”

The members plan to investigate the revisions to this report more thoroughly. Today they sent a letter to HHS Secretary Thompson protesting the changes to the *National Healthcare Disparities Report* and requesting information from HHS about the preparation and revision of the report.

The report released today was prepared by the Special Investigations Division of the minority staff of the Committee on Government Reform, and is part of the Committee’s continuing investigation into politics and science in the Bush Administration. The report, letter to HHS, and the two versions of the *National Healthcare Disparities Report* executive summary are available online at www.politicsandscience.org.